

# Future of transit: How will driverless cars and other changes impact Chicago?

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Ride sharing and driverless cars inevitably will change the Chicago region the way that railroads and highways have, says Marshall Brown, associate professor of architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology and co-director of [the Driverless City project](#).

But how exactly will this happen, and how might citizens influence the process?

Brown will be a panelist on the June 22 forum on harnessing technology for future mobility by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. It's the latest in [a series of community input efforts](#) to spur discussion on five trends and how Chicago can prepare for them as CMAP prepares to develop its 2050 regional plan.

Brown discusses how the convergence of technologies may improve how we get around as well as our society and economy.

## **Q: What does the convergence of these technologies mean for urban planning and architecture?**

A: Whether it's the wheelbarrow, chariot, horse and buggy, train or automobiles, we've seen that our ability to get around more easily and quickly shrinks places, because the time to get between them shrinks. That also tended to mean the increasing spread of the urban environment.

I'm talking about a multi-centered region; Peoria, [Naperville](#), [Schaumburg](#), the Loop, Wrigleyville, Beverly. This process started 100 years ago when trains arrived, then automobiles. We can reasonably expect these technologies will intensify that spread and decentralization.

## **Q: How would that affect Chicagoans specifically?**

A: Low-income people who currently rely on the bus with the train to go from the South Side of Chicago to jobs in Schaumburg or Naperville — which is very slow — now have access to things like ride-sharing, which is increasingly affordable and more flexible than a bus or train without owning a car. That's the bright side.

The dark side we see already: Longer commutes for everyone. Are taxi drivers being put out of work? Are Uber and Lyft drivers going to be replaced with autonomous vehicles?

## **Q: What does that mean for emerging architecture and urban planning models?**

A: The question is when cars can park themselves. Parking lots and structures could potentially take up much less space but also be much more concentrated. In places like downtown Chicago, your car could drop you at your high-rise in the early evening, go sleep in Indiana at night and pick you up in the morning.

It's also a question of when cars can come indoors more, like grocery stores you can drive through. Will you need a garage attached to your house anymore? Maybe you can use that space for something else.

Whether or not these things can actually happen, we're starting at a point where they're at least imaginable.

## **Q: What do residents need to understand about the future of mobility?**

A: The question always comes to me, "What is this technology shift going to do to me," as if the technology somehow controls us. The decision that's important to have is not what will technology do to us? It's how do we want our cities, suburbs and region to change, and how do we leverage the technology to get there?

Whether or not we allow people to be replaced with robots is our choice. People can vote with their feet and their wallets about what they want and don't want in this digitized society.

**Q: How can we plan ahead, since technology changes so quickly?**

A: That's a challenge for planning agencies. They like to make their plan for next 20 to 50 years based on data. There's not enough data or information yet about how these technologies perform that are now being deployed.

We're in a situation where we're going to have to start using our imagination again and start taking risks. You very rarely hear politicians talk about imagination, and it's even more rare to hear them talk about risk. With leveraging technology, we're going to have to get used to it again.

*Q-and-A's are edited for clarity and length.*

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